

**ROUGH DRAFT**

**CITY COUNCIL OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA  
Regular Meeting — October 9, 2001  
Partial Verbatim of Portion of Oral Presentations  
City Council Discussion**

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**Oral Presentations (I).**

Speck: The second thing and second and final thing that I wanted to bring up tonight relates to the Chetworth dog park. I visited recently with some representatives from Northeast Civic Association, and at, their most recent meeting sounded pretty wild. I mean, people yelling at each other and accusing each other of things and walking out, and all kinds of things. It almost sounded like a Council meeting. But clearly there, there are two camps over there. One, dog owners who like the location of the park and one are children owners who, who would prefer to see the dog run somewhere else, and I know that Sandra has been working for some time in an effort to try to resolve some of these issues. It does seem like a solution ultimately will lay in finding an alternative site and it sounds like it's gotten kind of ugly over there actually and I just wonder whether Council needs to sort of insert itself in this in some way and move this along or take some action or what do we need to know about it and what can we do.

Whitmore: I was not present but at the Northeast Civic Association last Tuesday night a week ago, they did approve the plan and I have it here, which is the plan that we have worked with the children's parents. This does not change the alignment of the park from what it is currently in right now with exception that we're bringing a gate directly into the children's area. Right now the children have to walk a short distance from the gate into their area, and they really do walk through the dogs if the dogs are present. So we are realigning it so the children can walk directly into the playground from the street, from that, street is a hard word here because it's really more like a, an alley. Anyway, the design was approved. I understand that the parents had tried to bring forth during the meeting the fact that they wanted to eliminate the dogs entirely from this and this was not brought forward because it was not on the agenda.. So it was a parliamentary procedure. So they did not back this plan, not because they didn't like the playground apparatus because they indeed chose it, but many of the parents are wanting the park for the children and have the dogs on leash. Then we have the other group that would like to have just the area for dogs. They feel that there are two other areas, Powhatan and Portner

Parks, that are adequate for the number of children in that area. I did earlier this evening with Lori looked at the, at our new census data, and there are about, or it was 384, 284 children in that area between the ages of infant through 11. So there are a significant amount of children in that northeast quadrant. The other thing is when we came to you with the dog master plan in September over a year ago we said that we would eliminate it and then it was, the wording rephrased to say that we will review this area when a more appropriate park became available. I did talk to Crescent which developing Potomac Yard last, or two weeks ago. They indicated to me that that dog park which will be a three-acre dog park in that area will be part of their first segment to the City and they hope to have all the City issues and permits done by 2002 and that they would start breaking ground in 2003, and this dog, the three-acre dog park there would be one of the first things they would do. And this would be an alternative location for that area.

Pepper: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Ms. Pepper.

Pepper: Where exactly is that located? Yeah, is that the one right there on Slater's Lane?

Whitmore: It's, it's just north of Slaters Lane. Yes.

Pepper: And is that going to be a gift?

Whitmore: Yes.

Pepper: That will be permanent? That we will accept?

Whitmore: Yes.

Pepper: Yes and yes. Well, those are the right answers. All right.

Mayor: David, anything else?

Speck: Yeah. I'm not sure that, that another couple of years before this park won't result in, in people killing each other over there. I mean, there seem to be some really strong feelings running between the families, parents of dogs and parents of children.

Whitmore: It is, it's divisive to the neighborhood.

Speck: And is there anything that we can do even on an interim basis that would allow us, I think, there, the long-term objective, clearly, is to have Chetworth as a

recreational people park and that, that would mean that, that no dogs or dogs only on leash.

Whitmore: Only dogs on leash.

Speck: Okay. So it would no longer be a dog run but dogs could still use the park.

Whitmore: Correct.

Speck: I, I know that's our long-term objective. Is, can you identify or, or maybe I'm catching you cold on this and you need to come back to us, whether there is any possibility of doing something on, on an interim basis for the next couple of years that would replace the dog run that might be reasonably acceptable and try to get this park back into the, the recreational park use that we want it to be?

Whitmore: Well, we've certainly tried to work with both factions up there. I don't, I can't right tonight give you a recommendation. I wish I could.

Speck: Well, I mean an alternative is if it starts to get even worse is just basically to, you know, prevent the park from being used by anyone until they can work it out. And just say, you know, the obligation here is to come up with some compromises or to make this park strictly a leash park, dogs on leash. I'm not sure. I'm, I'm not an expert on these things and that's why I'm asking but I, I was distressed to hear the, the way people seemed to be feeling about each other in that neighborhood and it seems like this is, this is an issue, an issue where the Council to some degree needs to assert itself and resolve it if it can.

Whitmore: Currently, the dog exercise area is about 60 percent of the park and the children's playground area is 40 percent, and that's what's shown in this design. The children's group came forward and wanted 50 percent of the park to get that much more room and that was rejected. So that was a compromise that was tried. I think if we go back again, this plan most people have no problems with. I think the children's people would like, the children, parents would like this very much if they'd OK'd it..

Mayor: Have you presented this plan to the civic association yet?

Whitmore: Yes. This was passed by the civic association a week ago. We spent all summer –

Pepper: Mr. Mayor, I thought it was the issue of the equipment and so forth that was approved and that that the location of those two sites there was not approved. They did not vote on that.

Whitmore: Yes. As I, this plan was approved as you see, at least that's what (?)

Woodson: That is not what I heard either.

Mayor: Well. You know. Oh, I heard that there was, there was just open warfare. I didn't, I didn't hear that they'd actually approved anything. I, you know –

Whitmore: Well, we've had three meetings like this. This is not the first, and –

Pepper: Mr. Mayor, I want to, I want to ask another question. David is really right on when he says that this is a problem that seems to be defying a solution there by the neighborhood. I mean I'm sure you'd be willing to do anything within reason of course of whatever the neighbors could come to a consensus on. But there doesn't seem to be that although maybe the next meeting there will be. But what I wanted to ask you was, do we have other arrangements like this? I don't recall having children's parks that close to our dog parks.

Whitmore: I don't recall any either.

Pepper: This seems to be kind of a unique situation.

Speck: Don't we have that over on Madison and Montgomery? Don't we have a dog run and a children's park?

Whitmore: But the dog run is at the far eastern part of the –

Speck: Oh. Okay.

Pepper: So it's not like this because you get the dogs running and, or the kids running and the dogs will start barking and so forth.

Mayor: Well, I don't know that we're going to solve this tonight unless someone's got a specific notion they want to bring on the table.

Pepper: Well.

Mayor: My suggestion would be that, that, I mean, if this is what the civic association has approved, well then, you know, I, I think that at this point we move forward. Now if there's an internal struggle within the civic association as to who voted and who didn't or, or, you know, I mean that's something, I mean they're adults and they're going to have to, to work it out and if they don't work it out well then I think you know Mr. Speck's suggestion and this, I'm going to leave this up to, to your judgment, Sandra, but Mr. Speck's suggestion that the Council is going to

have to assert itself and, and quite frankly, you know, and I'm just speaking for myself in this regard, but if it, if it's going to boil down to kids versus dogs, I'm going to support the kids. Maybe there's some folks in the Northeast Civic Association that don't want to hear that but I mean that's going to be my, that's going to be my, that's going to be my sentiment on this issue.

Pepper: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: So that might be encouragement for them to work it out. Yeah.

Pepper: I think one of the things that we really need to have before, and I think the, I think this group needs to know is if it isn't possible to speed this park up, I mean 2003 is a ways. If, if that turned out to be a reasonable alternative that people could get behind, then wouldn't it be nice for them to speed that up a bit so that we could resolve this quicker and I'm wondering if, if we could approach Crescent Resources and see if they would be willing to speed that up. That's the first thing. The second thing is I, I have to say how sad this makes me. I met with the group too and visited the park, and what, what, this is so sad to me. We've heard some of this before. When you have dog owners and the parents of children just eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe over an issue and of course it has a lot to do with scarce land and that, that's why if you increase the options that does hopefully help a bit although I understand that some of the dog owners are not terribly interested in that extra site, but it sounds like three acres—grab it, and I think that that's, at least we need to know what all of our options are. I think that's really what I'm saying.

Mayor: Well, but I, you know, I don't want to belabor this because I think we're getting too far along in the, in this particular issue but, but the decisions, you know, that we make, you know, basically are going to shape the city for the next 20, 30, 40 years. And you know if we make decisions that, that, you know do not provide adequately for our young people, well then, you know, we're not going to be a child-friendly community. And these, these are the same kind of issues –

Pepper: I'm not disagreeing.

Mayor: No, oh, no, I know you're not. I know you're not. I know you're not but I guess what I'm saying is that, is that, you know, I think that ultimately we may have to be decisive here. I mean this is a compromise. My feeling is move forward with it. If it's not going, if that, if that isn't going to mollify folks and they're still going to, going to have problems well then bring it back here and we'll decide it definitively. But, but you know, you know when we make decisions whether it's, it's Jones Point Park or you know or whether it's at Chetworth Park, you know, about what we're going to have for kids in this community. I mean you know those are defining decisions for the next 50 years. Joyce.

Woodson: Just to you know wrap this up a little bit, we did make a mistake last year because staff came to us and said that they don't think this is a good park setup and in my opinion I think we have two extremely strong park lobbies in this city. We have very strong animal right lobbies and we have very strong soccer lobbies and those are the two lobbies that we have and it's as though no one else exists. But they do exist and for the same reason that I wanted to have item no. 12 discussed this evening so that people could hear about what's out there and available to them for services was the very point that I raised to some of the folks who called and complained about this park. They didn't come. They didn't complain. They didn't say anything and we voted based on the people who did come and did complain and it's an issue that's very near and dear to our hearts and we've got an election coming up. It's the same kind of thing. People complain but they don't vote. I think we made the mistake by not paying enough attention to what the situation was. The park is very, very close to houses, not unlike the park at Simpson Field. Same kind of situation where you've got animal feces that are sitting there and quite frankly I don't think anyone on this board would want to live there. And I don't know how we dropped the ball, but I for one will take responsibility for having dropped the ball. We dropped it. And if it is to be revisited, I don't think we're going to drop it again, so, you know, all that to say you got to stand up for what it is that you believe in but we have been elected to not drop balls so we got to be careful.

Mayor: Okay.

Speck: Just, Mr. Mayor, just a ?? this. The difficulty with this, this compromise is that it addresses one concern, and that is the children will not need to come through the dog area to get to the park. But the underlying problem is the amount of space set aside for children recreational play is inadequate and the amount of space that's set aside for the dog run is inadequate. And it, it's not going to get any better, and I don't see that there's probably any solution that is going to resolve this until we can find an alternative site for the dog run and I think the question really is to ask, to ask staff to come back with any information that tells us if there's something we can do to expedite it. And if we can't, then we're going to think about it if there's something else we have to do.

Sunderland: Well, we'll look at the expediting of it. I don't think it's going to be possible, but we'll certainly take a look. But I, I have a feeling that, as Ms. Woodson's saying, you're right back to where we were whenever it was 12 months ago. The issues are exactly where they were. We kind of saw 'em there and made a recommendation and for whatever reason we, we are where we are and I think our recommendation if you come down to, to looking for a recommendation, there's absolutely nothing between then and now which is going to lead to a different recommendation than was made a little while ago. So if we don't get a resolution

of it, and I frankly, having lived up in that area for many years, I don't see how the two uses can coincide in what is a very, very small area. So, let us, let us work on it. We'll come back in two to four weeks on it and if we need bite the bullet on it we, we will, and we will respond, Okay?

Speck: Okay. Thank you.

Mayor: Okay. Mr. Cleveland.

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